Calendar Books

Burning the Clandestine At Both Ends

By Vernon A. Guidry Jr.

Ray S. Cline, one-time deputy director of the CIA who later also headed the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, has written a limited memoir-history of his 30 years in the cold. How in the world should his book be read?

How about viewing Cline as a thoughtful insider willing to divulge limited but enlightening material to better inform the public debate on this vital issue? Okay?

Let's pick a topic to see how this approach works. And not any of those horror stories either. Cline is sick of this savaging of the intelligence community by an irresponsible press that just concentrates on the negative and blows it out of proportion.

How about something from what Cline calls the "fabulous '50s," before CIA became something to scrawl on the washroom wall. Say 1956. That was the year that the romantic figure of Allen Dulles, spy master of them all, toured the world in a DC6 under blackout orders but nevertheless was met and honored by heads of state and other important people who entertained him and Cline, who also went along.

It was a triumphant progress through the "free world" and well it might have been because that year the CIA pulled off what Cline calls one of its "greatest coups of all time." That was finding a text of the secret speech to the 20th Communist Party Congress in which Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin for his crimes.

CLINE SAYS THE speech was secured through non-American intermediaries "at a very handsome price." And that's not all. Cline says he made an eloquent pitch for full and quick release of the speech and eventually won out over the boys in clandestine operations. They wanted to leak it out piecemeal and generally looked at the whole thing through the covert viewpoint which Cline found at times "excessively narrow and Byzantine."

Well, as luck would have it, one can't even write about the "greatest coups of all times" without someone interjecting a note of controversy. That someone was James Angleton, who was head of counterintelligence at the time and who was involved in securing the speech. Angleton probably doesn't like being called "excessively narrow and Byzantine" any more than the next fellow.

Angleton said publicly there was no "handsome price" paid at all. And the reason the clandestine types wanted to hold up release was that they were training Eastern Europeans to help along the national uprisings that were expected after release of this speech. Well, the speech got out before they were ready.

SO THERE'S DISAGREEMENT on this point. It's rather a big point, but so what? Well, shouldn't Cline have known? If Cline, despite his high rank in the organization and his direct involvement in consideration of disposition of the speech, was kept in the dark on so important a factor, what else was kept from him and how does it flaw the book?

Why did Angleton violate the secrecy that he has spent his life maintaining on this point. Is Angleton following some "excessively narrow and Byzantine" scheme.

This points up a difficulty with such a spy agency insider's account. There is always the nagging question of what are they really up to? Was Cline really in the dark? Is Angleton now really leveling? Deception was, after all, a way of life. What are their real purposes? What are their real views? One of the worst things Cline is willing to say about the agency is that its years of illegal domestic mail opening constituted "an error."

But Cline's book is more than reminiscence. There are recommendations on how to make things better. The CIA, for all he loves it, has become a PR liability. Drop the name, convert Langley Head-